



Forest Service

Rocky Mountain Regional Office

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Subject: Revised Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy

To: Colorado National Forest Supervisors, Forest Supervisor, Medicine Bow and
Routt National Forests and Thunder Basin National Grassland

On behalf of the national interagency Lynx Steering Committee, the Lynx Biology Team has completed the first major revision of the Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy (LCAS) since the original document was published in August 2000. The latest edition of the LCAS is available at: www.fs.fed.us/biology/resources/pubs/wildlife/LCAS_revisedAugust2013.pdf.

The main listing factor for the Canada lynx in 2000 was the lack of adequate direction in federal land use management plans, primarily national forest plans, to stem and reverse the decline of the species and its habitat across its range in the U.S. The original LCAS for many years was the primary reference for the federal land management agencies in implementing consistent, science-based approaches to lynx and habitat conservation on federal lands and in conducting section 7 consultations with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. More recently, the LCAS was highly influential in shaping the management direction in amendments to Forest Service land management plans to respond to the primary threat, including forest plans in the Rocky Mountain Region (Region 2) in October 2008.

Understandably, there will be questions about why the LCAS is being revised now and how this latest version relates to current forest plan management direction. First and foremost, the new report particularly benefits agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management and National Park Service that did not amend their plans and continue to rely primarily on the LCAS for the latest science and primary guidance for conserving the lynx and its habitat relative to their administrative lands. Substantial scientific information on snowshoe hares and lynx, the 2003 listing (Remanded Rule), and the lynx recovery outline (2005), have all emerged since the 2000 LCAS and compelled a revision to principally help those agencies. Much of this new information preceded, and has already been incorporated into, the Southern Rockies Lynx Amendment (SRLA). Additionally, there have been several recent scientific publications chiefly by Dr. John Squires and collaborators concerning their ongoing lynx investigations in the northern Rockies that needed consideration during the revision of the LCAS.

One aspect of the new LCAS generating early interest and questions is the stratification of risk factors from the 2000 LCAS, into now "anthropogenic influences" that have the potential to negatively affect lynx populations and habitat at a population level (Tier 1) vs. those that may have more local level effects on individual lynx but are not likely to have a substantial effect on populations and habitat (Tier 2). Examples of Tier 1 influences are climate change, vegetation management, wildland fire management, and fragmentation of habitat. Examples of Tier 2 influences are snow compaction, livestock grazing, forest and backcountry roads and trails, recreation, and minerals and energy exploration and development. Section 7 consultation requirements continue to apply to all proposed Tier 1 or 2-type federal activities where any effect on the Canada lynx is projected. However, Tier 2 activities are now considered in the



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revised LCAS to be of less concern than previously thought when the LCAS was originally developed. This is not unlike the stratification done for similar reasons in the Southern Rockies Lynx Amendment standards and guidelines, where the management standards are largely focused on programs and activities (primarily vegetation management) with potential to substantially affect the snowshoe hare prey base and lynx populations. Guidelines were developed for those activities expected to have more localized effect at an individual animal level.

The new LCAS does not compel the forest to change current management or replace or supersede existing forest plan direction. All management must continue to comply with your existing forest plan objectives and management direction for the Canada lynx and other resources. On a case-by-case basis at your discretion, you have latitude to explore whether additional management options or flexibility may exist to achieve your plan objectives and direction at the project or activity level in light of this new information. Use your expert level staffing on the forest and technical assistance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as appropriate to further guide you on these points.

Even though this version of the LCAS is not quite final and there is continuing work on a couple of issues by the Lynx Biology Team, the revision is largely complete and the agencies represented on the team wanted to provide the current scientific information in the interim. The newer version to be published as a 4th edition will be posted when available at the same web address. We will keep you updated on further developments.

Enclosed with this memo is a set of "Frequently Asked Questions" prepared by the Lynx Biology Team that explains in more detail the role of the LCAS, the purpose for the revision, major changes from the 2000 version, and relation to current management direction in land management plans. For further questions or comments, contact Peter McDonald, Region 2 Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Species Program Leader and Regional representative to the Lynx Biology Team, at 303.275.5029 or petermcdonald@fs.fed.us.

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Enclosure

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